

Shenandoah

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THE TENNESSEE AGRARIANS

A Reappraisal

RICHARD M. WEAVER

RICHMOND CROOM BEATTY

ASHLEY BROWN

THE AGRARIANS TODAY

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DONALD DAVIDSON

FRANK L. OWSLEY

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Richard M. Weaver

THE TENNESSEE AGRARIANS

The often quoted saying of President Davis that if the South lost the war, its history would be written by the North, proved partly wrong and partly right. Between 1865 and 1900 the South wrote its history with vigor and in volume, and the literature of Southern apologia published in that period makes a fair-sized library. But there is some room for saying that the writers of these years wrote well rather than wisely, so that Davis's prophecy was in one point borne out. It was not so much history as special pleading which was presented; and while this may have softened, it did not materially change the national verdict.

This statement should of course not be made without due recognition of the genius and energy which were spent in defending the South's cause and in justifying its culture. The literature of the post-bellum era falls into three rather distinct phases: military and political defenses written in the shadow of defeat; romantic re-creations of ante-bellum civilization, chiefly in fiction; and continuations of the political and social argument, with some addition of perspective and objectivity. The first group contains some brilliant effort; and the South should never have been allowed to forget the herculean labors of Albert Taylor Bledsoe, whose *Is Davis a Traitor?* is one of the great American polemics, or the militant work of Robert Lewis Dabney, whose *A Defense of Virginia and Through her of the South* is a tough piece of reasoning. The second group was in milder vein. Represented most completely by John Esten Cooke and Thomas Nelson Page, it threw a silvery romance over all things Southern which was not entirely to the South's advantage, although the motives were unimpeachable. In the third group appeared men of such differing talents

and vocations as Woodrow Wilson, Basil Gildersleeve (whose article "A Southerner in the Peloponnesian War" is worth reading today), J. L. M. Curry, and John S. Wise. To their exposition they brought the detachment of time and some feeling of re-incorporation in the Union. Yet as the period closed with the South trying to explain itself and gain recognition, there is reason to say that its history was still being framed from the outside.

The effective statement of its cause did not appear until a quarter of a century later, from men who had never worn Confederate gray, or witnessed the chaos of Reconstruction, or even cherished political ambition. These were a group of scholars and writers having a kind of center at Vanderbilt University, who found, mainly through their literary and philosophic disciplines, the means of giving the South what it had so long needed—a doctrine resting upon independent assumptions. The Fugitive-Agrarian movement took form in the early 1920's, and it presented during the next fifteen years one of the few effective challenges to a monolithic culture of unredeemed materialism. This challenge received its most comprehensive expression in a symposium entitled *I'll Take My Stand*, published in 1930. Here twelve self-confessed Southerners drew up a now classic indictment of the industrial society and its metaphysic "Progress."

Although the Agrarians were men of academic and literary profession, two things had combined to turn their attention to the question of regional difference. First, a considerable number of them had enjoyed the opportunity of European education or residence, which the older Southern spokesmen generally had not. That experience had led them to look at the South in the broad picture of Western European civilization. What they saw—what they had to see—was that the South, with its inherited institutions and its system of values, was a continuation of Western European culture and that the North was the deviation. That discovery takes on significance as soon as one reflects that by rule the deviation, and not the continuation, requires the defense. Thus there appeared a logical ground for putting the South in the position of plaintiff and the North in that of defendant, a reversal of the roles which had been played for a hundred years.

Second, an important number of Agrarians were poets. The

very acceptance of poetry commits one to the realm of value, and this meant that their judgments were to be in part ethical and aesthetic. They were thus concerned immediately with the quality of the South; and this orientation put the case upon an independent footing. It was of course impossible to revive interest in the South's legal claims, and political claims alter with circumstances. But claims based upon ethical and aesthetic considerations are a different matter; they cannot be ignored at any time, and it was these which furnished the principal means of attack.

In sum, it was not until about 1925 that Southern intellectuals caught up with Lee and Jackson. The latter had known in 1862 that the one chance for the South was to carry the fight to the enemy. They fully appreciated the principle, only recently brought to public attention, though actually as old as warfare, that the best defense is a good offense. For various reasons, chiefly political, they were prevented from carrying out that policy, and the defensive struggle ended in defeat. A comparable fate overtook the Southern apologists of the next fifty or sixty years, as we have already indicated. They spent themselves in parrying, denying, and defending, and their victories were defensive victories. But with *I'll take My Stand* the turn came; here Southern intellectuals for the first time conducted a general offensive against the enemy positions, with some excellent results. Penetrations were made and flanks were threatened; and the enemy was alerted to a degree he had not experienced in decades. I stress this aspect despite the suggestion of the book's title and titles of some of the contributions. They sound defensive, but the tactic was actually offense. A few representative quotations will make that apparent enough.

No reader of the volume will forget, for example, John Crowe Ransom's demolishing attack upon the theory of industrial society.

Progress never defines its ultimate objective, but thrusts its victims at once into an infinite series. Our vast industrial machine, with its laboratory centers of experimentation, and its far-flung organs of mass production, is like a Prussianized state which is organized strictly for war and can never consent to peace.

There can never be stability and establishment in a community whose every lady member is sworn to see that her mate is not eclipsed in the competition for material advan-

tages; the community will fume and ferment, and every constituent part will be in perpetual physical motion. The good life depends on leisure, but leisure depends on an establishment, and the establishment depends on a prevailing magnanimity which scorns personal advancement at the expense of the free activity of the mind.

Industrialism is an insidious spirit, full of false promises and generally fatal to establishments since, when it once gets into them for a little renovation, it proposes never to leave them in peace. Industrialism is rightfully a menial, of almost miraculous cunning but no intelligence; it needs to be strongly governed or it will destroy the economy of the household. Only a community of tough conservative habit can master it.

John Gould Fletcher took the subject of education. Traditional Southern education of the classical type had as its aim the producing of good men. Now we are being asked to surrender that in favor of the type which makes "the public-school product of New York City or Chicago a behaviorist, an experimental scientist in sex and firearms, a militant atheist, a reader of detective fiction, and a good salesman." Furthermore:

We achieve character, personality, gentlemanliness in order to make our lives an art and to bring our souls into relation with the whole scheme of things, which is the divine nature. But the present-day system of American popular education exactly reverses this process. It puts that which is superior—learning, intelligence, scholarship—at the disposal of the inferior. It says in effect that if the pupil acquires an education, he will be better able to feed and clothe his body later. It destroys the intellectual self-reliance of character, and the charm of balanced personality, in order to stuff the mind with unrelated facts. Its goal is industry rather than harmonious living and self aggrandisement rather than peace with God.

Stark Young expressed the choice before us:

It would be childish and dangerous for the South to be stampeded and betrayed out of its own character by the noise, force, and glittering narrowness of the industrialism and progress spreading everywhere, with varying degrees, from one region to another.

We can put one thing in our pipes and smoke it—there will

never again be distinction in the South until—somewhat contrary to the doctrine of popular and profitable democracy—it is generally clear that no man worth anything is possessed by the people, or sees the world under a smear of the people's wills and beliefs.

This, at present, un-American idea of education may spread if in our schools and universities a less democratic, mobbed, and imitative course of things should come to be; with less booming and prating, organizing, unrest, babble about equipment, election of trustees from the Stock Exchange—all signs of an adolescent mentality and prosperous innocence of what culture may mean. I shall never forget the encouragement with which I saw for the first time that some of the dormitory doors at the University of Virginia needed paint, so sick was I at the bang-up varnishing, re-building, plumbing, endowing, in some of the large Northern institutions. If they learn little at these Virginia halls, it is doubtless as much as they would learn at the others, and they at least escape the poison of the success idea that almost every building is sure to show, the belief that mechanical surface and outer powers of money are the prime things in living.

These were startling sentiments, but it can be said with truth, in looking back over the total response, that the nation as a whole welcomed this book. That is because the nation as a whole wishes the South to speak, and wishes it to speak *in character*. The last phrase is essential. Despite our excitement over differences, our pain over invidious comparisons, and our resentment of suspected superiorities, we desire, as long as we are in possession of our rational faculty, to hear an expression of the other point of view. That is a guarantee of our freedom and a necessity for our development. And the other point of view, to carry any conviction, must not be expressed apologetically. When you are impressed with the positive value of anything, whether it be a way of life or a creed or an art-form, you do not fall back upon defensive postures, for that is to accept defeat in advance. You go forth in the evangelical spirit and seek out the opponent. That is why *I'll Take My Stand* was read in quarters where the vapid professions of Southern liberals aroused no sign of interest.

Of course there were elements by which the book was not welcomed, and they can be pretty well tagged by the brickbats

they threw. Among them were, as would be guessed, the philistines, including especially journalists of both the literary and newspaper variety. The ground of their opposition is not far to seek. Being opposed to culture as such, they no doubt realized that any genuine revival of culture would leave them exposed for what they are. The mortal enmity of philistine and poet was present in this clash. These opponents made much noise, but it is hard for them to touch people who work at the level of *I'll Take My Stand* and other Agrarian publications.

There was another type of critic who summed up his opposition in the familiar saying, "You can't turn the clock back." The most charitable thing that can be said of him is that he is confused in a fundamental way. No one beyond the first grade in philosophy believes that time can be reversed. What the Agrarians, along with people of their philosophic conviction everywhere, were saying is that there are some things which do not have their subsistence in time, and that certain virtues should be cultivated regardless of the era in which one finds oneself born. It is the most arrant presentism to say that a philosophy cannot be practiced because that philosophy is found in the past and the past is now gone. The whole value of philosophy lies in its detachment from accidental conditions of this kind and its adherence to the essential. Any idealistic position must insist that circumstances yield to definitions and not definitions to circumstances. These opponents have not considered the saying of Spinoza: "In so far as the mind conceives a thing according to the dictate of reason, it will be equally affected whether the idea be of a thing present, past, or future."

A more formidable opposition appeared among what might be called the Southern collaborationists. They are men who have accepted completely the doctrine of progress, and who have their entire investment of substance, position, and prestige in it. They are the ones who want more factories, more of everything which would make the South a replica of Lowell and Schenectady and Youngstown with a consequent swelling of bank deposits and pay-rolls. Not all of them are disingenuous; some of them are simply unable to see an alternative. The collaborationists were not very vocal in the terms of this argument; but they work from rich

upholstered offices, and it is they who have dealt the Agrarians their hardest blow. With the business man's grasp of reality, they have sensed the opposition to their order in a vital religious-aesthetic movement, and they have countered with a shrewd stroke. They have dispersed the Agrarians. Undoubtedly the Agrarians would exert an immensely greater influence if they held some city or some university, if they had a concentration of forces which would serve as a radiating center of impulse—if they had a Rome, as it were. This the business men have seen to it they do not have. Scattered now from Nashville to New Haven and from Princeton to Minneapolis they are comparatively impotent. The collaborationists have had the best of this phase, and the Agrarians are left with only a rhetorical victory.

It would be false to deny that in the practical realm things have become very much worse. There is no more melancholy spectacle on the American scene than the fact that South Carolina, which in former times set the best example of the ideal of chivalry, is now the site of the hydrogen bomb project, which prepares for indiscriminate slaughter on a scale not hitherto contemplated. Thus far there has been no objection from South Carolina. And indeed other Southern states are in no way behind in asking for industrialism on any terms and for any purpose.

Yet over against these discouraging facts one may set certain facts about human history and development. One of them is that the potentiality for change is always greater than we realize at any given moment. There have been revolutions in human affairs which appear miraculous in the light of the conditions which preceded them. Ultimately it is the human psyche which determines the kind of world we live in, and history is marked with radical changes of phase which could undermine even so seemingly impregnable a thing as our modern scientific-technological order. One could not do better than close with the final sentences of the "Introduction" to *I'll Take My Stand*. They are more important now than they were then, since an even greater fraction of our people seems to believe that we are being hurried along by uncontrollable forces toward a society like that depicted by Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-four*.

If a community, or a section, or a race, or an age, is groaning

under industrialism, and well aware that it is an evil dispensation, it must find the way to throw it off. To think that this cannot be done is pusillanimous. And if the whole community, section, race, or age thinks it cannot be done then it has simply lost its political genius and doomed itself to impotence.

Richmond Croom Beatty

A PERSONAL MEMOIR OF THE AGRARIANS

Personal references are, I hope, forgivable in an essay of this sort. When *I'll Take My Stand* was being written and assembled during the academic year 1929-30, I was finishing work for the Ph.D. at Vanderbilt. Two of my professors were John Donald Wade and John Crowe Ransom. Donald Davidson had an office on the same third floor of Calhoun Hall—a hall which accommodated his colleagues, along with some four or five “teaching fellows,” of which I was one. Despite the fact that Ransom was completing his volume *God Without Thunder*, Wade his biography, *John Wesley*, Davidson running his fine weekly critical book-review page in the Nashville *Tennessean*, the Knoxville *Journal*, and the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*—despite all this, we graduate students sensed that something beyond the ordinary was brewing. Our suspicions seemed more than verified when we noticed Dr. Frank Owsley of the History department on the first floor gliding quietly from time to time into an office upstairs, manuscript in hand, and closing the door behind him. What were the Profs. up to? We tried to talk Mr. Ransom into an explanation in our Spenser seminar. In his always polite way he reminded us, as I recall, that the subject of the seminar was Edmund Spenser and that some of us had not especially distinguished ourselves in our recent examinations.

Shortly after this incident Mr. Allen Tate visited the campus. I had never met him (not having been a Vanderbilt undergraduate), but I asked one of the Fellows who had been around a long time to identify him for me as we stood in the Kissam Hall “chow line.” “Oh, he’s that guy over there with the enormous head [I’m almost certain he used that phrase!] who talks all the time and who has written biographies of Jackson and Jefferson Davis. Also a poet. Guess he belongs to the conspiracy too.”

The "conspiracy," of course, was *I'll Take My Stand*. I will venture to speak for no one except myself of that delightful fraternity of fellows who so often argued the issues of the world until five o'clock in the morning. I will simply say: *the book waked me up!*

To have been reared in a modern Southern industrial city was an experience to be everlastingly cherished because of the family ties, along with the "deep sworn vows" which friendly relations with a few people can never dissolve, despite whatever attritions both time and distance conspire to perpetrate. In thinking of those friendships I have recurrently wondered: Why shall I always feel affectionately toward this or that person, whom I have not seen, perhaps, in twenty years? The theory of innocence doesn't altogether answer the question. I believe it is due to the fact that we had certain things in common (for example, no one called another a 'son of a bitch' unless he expected to have his head bashed in with a brick-bat). Those fundamental things, boiled down, amounted to a countrified background. However much they might try to conceal the fact, it would always come out, if apologetically, in the end: "My Mama and Papa were born near Montgomery"—a statement which meant that they were born on a farm some twenty-five miles from the capital of the State. Years later a young graduate student remarked, with a slight blush, "To tell the truth my home is at a place called 'Smith's Switch,' Alabama." How much more wonderful than saying "Bessemer, Alabama" I thought of replying, but did not.

What the "movement" awakened in us mainly was the critical sense. Advertisers may be more subtle about their programs now, but "If It Helps Business It Helps You," "Birmingham, the Magic City" were slogans one accepted unthinkingly during adolescence, and even earlier. I recall a charming lady teacher in grade school who would show us statistics in the back of our geography book; population of Birmingham, 1890, 1900, 1910—so many, so many, so many thousands. Birmingham was growing by leaps and beyond bounds. Population of Atlanta, 1890, 1900, 1910. Atlanta was still ahead, but if we kept on expanding at our present rate we would surpass it, and then would come more factories, more railroad yards, more big chain stores like the fabulous Sears Roebuck

Company, and in short more money for our papas to make and spend and to pay to the schoolteachers. Why not believe in this gospel? Were not the terms *bigness* and *greatness* synonymous? Wasn't New York the biggest city in the world, as soon as it could catch up with London in population?

Then came the Agrarians—writing about a way of life that was comparatively simple and dignified, if ever so slow and unprogressive. But with their pronouncements also came, if ever so dimly recognized, that critical sense, or in other words, an unwillingness to swallow slogans, no matter how handsomely displayed. Beyond that, as if to re-enforce what they were by implication saying, there settled upon us all the grimmest economic depression in American history—the so-called “Hoover Depression.” The point is that one forced himself to read more carefully, to evaluate what he read and not, like some hungry hound, to swallow everything he saw merely because this or that well-heeled editor or editorialist had set down a given program or way of life as the ultimate truth.

Here was real criticism—transferred from some stale recital of the Three Unities or Fielding's theories about the novel into the actualities of one's personal situation. Perhaps we began for the first time to think seriously about our Civil War ancestors, about the ultimate decision they made, a decision that drove them to poverty or death. Were they, after all, villians, or madmen? We know well enough now that they were neither. The Agrarians, as I see it, awakened many of us to an awareness of our tradition which the “New South” apostles would have us forget. I think of them as people who—when passing a country cemetery—would not slow down their seventy-mile an hour rate of speed to permit the thought: “My grandaddy is buried over there.” In the words of Beowulf poet I would say of them, as of Scyld Scefing: ‘Leton holm bearan, geafon to garsecg.’ They have forfeited their right to live.

A Symposium

THE AGRARIANS TODAY

Five Questions

We are publishing below the replies to a list of questions submitted to the authors of *I'll Take My Stand*. The order of replies is that of the essays in the anthology. The questions follow:

1. *The events of the last generation (New Deal, Second World War) seem to have accentuated the tendency towards monopoly capitalism. If this is so, has it in your opinion made even more remote the idea of a society with a large number of small holders and owners?*

2. *What tendencies in regard to agrarianism do you consider most hopeful in the South of 1952?*

3. *What religious meaning do you think was implied in I'll Take My Stand and Who Owns America? Have we in the past two decades moved closer to or further from your answer to the above?*

4. *Have you any positive indication that the various statements of agrarian principles made in the 1930's exerted real influence? In what way?*

5. *In what ways do you think that regionalism as a literary and sociological movement confirms or contradicts the agrarian principles?*

John Crowe Ransom

I will answer briefly questions 1, 2, 4, skip 3 and 5, and add No. 6 of my own.

1. I think there will always be agrarians, and especially if we identify them culturally, as people who like the soil, and the "way of life" of the soil, and the literature of the soil. But as for

an agrarian "society," I suppose we shall not again in this country, North or South, see the ideal embodied so solidly as that. The South is evidently determined upon the course which in these times will give it wealth and power, and that is by way of industrial capitalism. On the whole I do not feel hurt because most people do not share my simple tastes in life. It is not strange if a way of power should win people from a way of life. My principal concern now is that the South may make the best of its new economy, know precisely how it works, and use its new power well.

2. I find several things hopeful in the South today. First, perhaps, that there has been continued emigration of its Negro population into other States, so that the high ratio of Negroes to total population continues to decline everywhere in the South. It seems to me that the equalization of the Negro population throughout the country offers the best and easiest solution of the "problem"; best for the Negroes, best for the whites. And second, that the South has embraced the new economy at the moment when it has been humanized by the New Deal. As I understand it, the actual American economy is based on the extension of the techniques of mass production. But the New Deal followed the theories of Keynes and other modern economists—and incidentally it followed the course compelled for it by the sheer pressure of events in 1929-33—in seeing that you cannot have mass production unless you have mass consumption too; and that the cue for all future government in this country is by every possible indirect means to distribute purchase-money among the groups which have not had it. In the long run,—but why not say the short run, almost immediately?—the Negro population itself has to have its share in purchase and consumption of goods. Otherwise it will be the worse for the prosperity of captains of industry, bankers, farmers, and storekeepers alike. And therefore the improvement of the status of Negroes has a powerful economic impetus in its favor already, as well as a slow but peremptory moral persuasion. The third hopeful thing, indeed, is just that I sense as something very real the improvement in race relations in the South. I do not like to see the Federal government trying to enforce civil rights in the South, especially in view of the rapid improvement already going on; this is what I say to my Northern friends. To my Southern

friends I must say: Go just as fast as you can towards giving the Negro his full complement of rights after his centuries of slavery and low caste.

4. Agrarianism has been and is an ideal having considerable influence upon American living even in the neighborhood of the cities and factories. It is a stock term which young men in colleges handle knowingly and respectfully. I know that every year there are student groups all over the country coming to the veterans of *I'll Take My Stand* for better information about this philosophy; they are just like the Editors of this number of *Shenandoah*.

6. Today we live *economically* and physically in mass production, which is a new cultural force in the world tending in directions we cannot yet define. But that does not keep some persons, perhaps most of the persons in the collegiate population of the country, from taking their art and literature, and therefore from living *culturally*, after the ancient European tradition which was founded upon the life of the land. Nothing can stop this sort of thing in a free society; which confers its freedom upon cultural minorities as upon individuals. Most of my present readers certainly do not conform culturally with their economic determinants. We live in a cultural crisis, a moment "between the cultures." But that is not difficult nor dangerous. I am too old to give up my own old-fashioned tastes. Eventually we shall see what we see, and I find it fascinating to wonder what it will be.

Donald Davidson

1. The question, as stated, obscures the real issues. The present dominance of industrialism, no matter how formidable, does not prove its inherent goodness or desirability, or predict anything about its permanence. The prospective remoteness (or nearness) "of a society with a large number of small holders and owners" has nothing to do with the validity of the principles supported by the Southern "Agrarians" in 1930 and later. I do not know whether the question, as framed, was intended to carry the pragmatic implications that I find in it. At any rate, both in

1930 and later, the "Agrarians" condemned the pragmatic approach as one of the most vicious of modern errors. They did not surrender then, and I do not surrender now, to the servile notion that the existence of a powerful "trend" is a mark of its "inevitability." All the works of men result from human choices, human decisions. There is nothing inevitable about them. We are subject to God's will alone; we are not subject to any theory of mechanical determinism originating in "social forces."

But, since the question may not have been intended to carry the meaning indicated above, I will add, by way of general comment, that there is nothing in the present state of affairs to justify the belief, once loudly asserted, that industrialism can provide a cure for social and economic ills. Rather, one may say the contrary has been demonstrated: that industrialism, far from curing such ills, spreads them far and wide, renders them severely epidemic, and then enforces them as a form of chronic social disease.

The evidence is before our eyes. Industrialism has followed the course predicted by the "Agrarians." Industrialism represents, as has been said, "the decision of society to invest its resources in the applied sciences." As an agent of applied science (and with the full consent and approval of "pure" science), it can now, as formerly, multiply its ingenious devices for exploiting and using nature, and thus can confer what are known as "material benefits." But that is all it can do. It has not fulfilled, and cannot fulfill, the buoyant promises made in its name two decades ago by those advocates who, while sneering at the "Agrarians," confidently asserted that industrialism would bring new liberty, more universal happiness, vaster enlightenment, and immense prosperity to the United States at large and to the South in particular.

Industrialism has increased its sway, as those advocates argued it should. It has provided more and better automobiles, airplanes, refrigerators, and weapons of war—including the atomic bomb. And it has also become a party to the infliction of war, death, and destruction on an unprecedented scale. It has wasted our resources to the point of danger. It has degraded society, perverted education, and undermined religion. It has invaded, abridged, and all but destroyed our constitutional liberties, and now threatens to convert our government into a totalitarian regime. It has spread

confusion and suspicion; it has begotten corruption and treason; it has reduced millions to a state of groveling servility and fear.

If it be objected that these evils are not to be attributed to industrialism as such, I can only point to the record of history, which reveals that these evils regularly accompany the industrialization of societies and nations. But perhaps it would be technically more correct to say that these evils are allied with socialism in its various modern forms, including Marxism; and that modern socialism, in turn, is clearly the chief political by-product of an industrial regime.

Socialism enters the political field by way of proposing remedies for the evils of industrialism, but it does not propose to abolish or curtail industrialism or change its basic character in any way; it merely proposes to remodel the government. The remedy then proves to be far worse than the disease, as the state of the world now bears witness. It should be observed that Marxist Communists and other varieties of socialists, while loudly denouncing "capitalism," are very intent upon preserving industrialism, through government ownership or similar means. It is evident, then, that "industrialism" is by no means necessarily to be identified with "capitalism." One of the great mistakes of capitalism has been that it put its trust blindly in industrialism, and thus opened the door to socialism, which is the monstrous offspring of the over-expanded industrial system. If the business men of the nineteen-thirties really meant, as they claimed, to preserve "free enterprise," they should have studied agrarian principles.

This observation brings me to the other side of the picture. The Southern "Agrarians" of 1930, in arguing their position, offered the South as an example of a society which, though partially industrialized, had not yet committed itself in that direction as far as the North. With all its admitted imperfections, the South was nevertheless held to represent the older, more truly American or New World type of society from which the North was heretically seceding. It was argued that this, the original American ideal, to which the South had been faithful, had tremendous meaning for the nation in its time of decision. For that ideal, if adhered to with reasonable adaptations, offered a thoroughly American system, neither Fascist nor Communist in nature. It was pointed

out that Southern society—like the older American society in general—based its culture upon the family and upon ownership of property, especially agricultural land; also that it was deeply religious and politically conservative; and that, as a society, it had retained a community of spirit and, in the classic sense, a piety of incalculable value in public affairs.

From that general picture I would not retract a particle. It is a true picture. Now, however, I would amend earlier statements by saying that the term "agrarian" was too narrow a description of the society that the "Agrarians" were advocating; and that, in the discussions of the nineteen-thirties, too much emphasis was put upon economics. The emphasis should have been put, more firmly, upon religion.

I would myself prefer to describe the South—or any portion of the country that the description might fit—as a traditional society of the New World type, considered in contrast to the anti-traditional society imposed by the industrial order. The farm, whether large or small, together with all allied establishments partaking of its organic and natural character, obviously would furnish the basis for such a society, rather than the non-organic, artificial "organizations" that industrialism is always busily erecting and always, just as busily, throwing on the junk-heap. I have not heard of any other kind of society in which human beings can hope to come as near as they can in this kind of traditional society to realizing their capacities as "whole persons" or "real persons"—a thing all but impossible under an industrial regime, which wants only specialists, or pieces of men.

Without such a society I do not see how we can have a nation in any true sense, or any kind of government other than the despotic. If America has anything new and valuable to offer the world, it would surely be a society of the kind indicated. This was the kind of society that we set out to establish on our New World shores. It was for that that we were once famous, since we offered a hope that had long since withered in the Old World. If we cherish any other ideal but this, we shall only become more and deeply involved in the tedious and bloody repetitions of disaster with which the pages of history are filled and of which Europe is now mortally sick. The question, then, is not whether such a society is remote

or near, but only whether that is what we want and mean to achieve.

2. Certain negative tendencies are "hopeful"—among them the fact that "liberalism" can no longer serve as the mask of socialism and Communism to the same plausible degree as in the past. Although our political leadership has been tragically inept on the whole, the rise of the "state's rights" party and the present insurgency of Southern elements are hopeful signs. Southern farm life, however, has been deeply injured by the New Deal and the Fair Deal, as likewise by such intrusive agents as T.V.A., which while boasting about its agricultural program (now abandoned in favor of a straight power development), has consistently used its influence to promote industrialization of the farm.

3. The economic issues of the nineteen-thirties unfortunately overshadowed the religious basis of agrarian principles, which was firmly indicated by Allen Tate in his *I'll Take My Stand* essay and has been more fully developed in later discussions. There can hardly be such a thing as a "society," in any true sense, without religion as the all-pervasive arbiter of value. Socialism is in principle atheistical and anti-religious. It holds that men can perfect their life by the exercise of purely rational and material means. It attempts to deny the existence of the supernatural and tends to obliterate the distinction between good and evil. In this process the moral responsibility of the individual is shifted to society as a whole. But since, in this way of thinking, all values become relative, it soon becomes impossible for society or government to exert any moral force, and no morality is left anywhere. "Christian socialism" is thus a contradiction in terms, though it is commonly used, often enough in self-deception, to cloak what actually is fatal surrender.

This brings me to the second part of your question: Whether we have moved closer to or away from the ideal of religion upheld by the "Agrarians." I am obliged to say that our Protestant churches, in their official institutional role, have definitely moved away from this ideal to the extent that they have abandoned the fundamental truths and doctrines of Christianity and substituted the false humanitarian and mechanistic concepts of socialism in its various forms.

That our Protestant clerical leadership has done this to a lamentable extent, especially at the higher levels, and thus fallen into the sin of secular materialism, is scandalously evident. To a member of his congregation, seeking consolation and advice in his battle with evil or in his despair at bereavement or disaster, the typical "liberal" clergyman can offer only about the same sort of comfort and assurance as is offered by a political candidate, a beautician, a radio entertainer or a psycho-analyst—to name examples in a descending scale. To what extent congregations are affected by this unfortunate collapse of the clerical function, I cannot say. I believe that the Southern people by natural inclination are truly religious, but whether they will soon muster strength to resist the influence of clerical secularism remains to be seen. This defect of the clergy, however, must certainly be the cause of a noticeable growing tendency of our young people, particularly among the more highly educated groups, to join the Catholic church, and of the less educated to swell the ranks of the small Fundamentalist sects.

4. I have no reliable means of knowing how much influence has been exerted by the statements of agrarian principles made during the nineteen-thirties. But certainly the vigor of Communist, leftist, and "liberal" attacks upon the "Agrarians," in the nineteen-thirties and later, seems to indicate that those principles were having influence and were therefore feared by their enemies. I note that these attacks were heavily renewed, as recently as two years ago, in articles published by the *Saturday Review of Literature*, the *American Scholar*, and other periodicals. On the positive side, the hospitable interest of the editors of *Shenandoah*, in arranging the present discussion, is testimony to the current relevance of agrarian principles. My general impression is that the younger generation of the nineteen-fifties is far more interested in agrarian principles than was the younger generation of the nineteen-thirties.

5. Regionalism is a flimsy and inadequate term for an important feature of American life. The term has been so much abused that I hesitate to enter upon a discussion of the question asked. The metropolitan critic would like to use "regionalism" as an epithet to indicate his condescension towards anything non-metropolitan—and therefore, in his view, inferior. The sociologist, while much

more careful about his definition, is too apt to join hands with the political scientist and reduce "regionalism" to some weak administrative meaning. If "regionalism" can be taken to apply to the familiar complex of ways that makes the South "different" in its fashion, as other regions or sections are "different" in their fashions, then certainly "regionalism" confirms and supports "agrarian" principles, which are friendly to differentiations and hostile to rubber-stamp uniformity. In this connection it should be noted that the South, which is the most self-consciously regional or sectional of all the American regions (or sections), and which also has long been the most agrarian-minded, has made a notably vigorous and distinguished contribution to American literature during the past thirty years.

Frank L. Owsley

Before making specific comment on your questions, let me make some observations on agrarianism in its economic aspects as understood by the group of Southerners who wrote the essays in *I'll Take My Stand*. There is little doubt that there was not complete agreement as to the economics of agrarianism among the writers. For example, Lanier, Warren, Klien, and myself, probably thought more in terms of a balanced economy than did Davidson, Ransom, Tate, Lytle, Fletcher, and Stark Young. John Wade, at the time, if I recall, was in sympathy with the idea of agrarianism in a modified form, but was skeptical of the realism of the more solid and fundamentalist agrarians such as Lytle. As time passed, however, Wade seemed to become more of a pure agrarian in his sympathies, though always a skeptical and realistic thinker. Actually, of course, there was a great core of principles on which we all were in enthusiastic agreement: we most ardently wished to see rural life and rural economy restored to health and respectability, particularly in the South where health and respectability had been lacking since 1860. We were agreed that the wide-spread ownership of land by those who lived on the land and earned their living from it was of paramount importance in accomplish-

ing health and respectability. I do not believe, however, that there was any special advocacy of a society composed of small holders: in fact, while the tenant class was a special object of our concern and we advocated the rehabilitation of this class as far as possible by restoring the lands to them, we certainly regarded the larger landholder—if he were not an absentee landlord—as a most necessary ingredient of a well balanced rural society. At what stage industrialization should cease in an ideal society as contemplated by the authors of *I'll Take My Stand* was actually never discussed fully. Perhaps there was a feeling that we were in agreement and no effort was made to explore the possibility of differences. Perhaps, in appraising agrarianism as set forth in *I'll Take My Stand*, *Who Owns America*, and many essays in *The American Review* and other magazines, it would be well never to lose sight of the fact that the thinking and writing were during much of the *Great Depression* that drove many young intellectuals into Communism and its concomitant, atheism. To us, as well as to those who went over to the radical left, industrial and financial capitalism had failed to sustain a stable and healthy society. Most of us, I believe, were of the opinion that America was over-industrialized in terms of both the American and the world market—ability to purchase, and we were certainly unwilling to manufacture and distribute our goods abroad, so as to get rid of them. Perhaps such a blind alley may have impelled some of our group to contemplate less industrialization than under ordinary circumstances they would have done. I believe, however, *Who Owns America*, published in 1936, is a more considered statement of agrarian economics than our earlier writing done during the desperate first years of the *Great Depression*. "The Pillars of Agrarianism," first published in *The American Review* (1935) and submitted to quite a number of the contributors to *I'll Take My Stand*, was an attempt to state some of the basic principles of agrarianism which we were agreed on. In writing that, I was attempting to establish a picture of a balanced economy—a balance between agriculture and industry. Another important matter, which should be seriously considered in order to place *I'll Take My Stand* in its proper context is that the book was a sharp, even bitter, protest, not just against industrialization as such, but especially against the brazen and con-

temptuous treatment of the rural South by the industrial North as a colony and as a conquered province. Industrialism in the South was absentee landlordism, the exploitation by absentee landlords who despised those whom they exploited. There is no question that much of the bitter resentment of backward peoples in the Orient against, what they term "White Imperialism," and more frequently, "Yankee Imperialism" is similar to that felt by the contributors to *I'll Take My Stand* in 1930.

Besides the protest against absentee ownership and the arrogance of those who profited by exploiting "The Tobacco Road South" (as a lieutenant governor of Massachusetts called us in 1948), there was and is, on the part of those of the former group with whom I have been in contact, a fixed belief that, past a certain point, industrialization would reach a condition of saturation. As I have said, the *Great Depression* focused this belief more sharply at the time than it would have otherwise been focused. Long before the *Great Depression*—in fact while still a graduate student at the University of Chicago—I had reached the conclusion that it would only be a matter of time—and not a very long time at that—when all the leading countries of the world would be self-sufficient industrially and would not buy nor be able to sell except to their own people. In other words, tho' opposed to economic nationalism and believing in free trade, it seemed obvious to me that the world was headed in the direction of economic nationalism. (In the near future Japan, Germany, and England will probably be fully rehabilitated industrially, and India and the far East will either be blocked off by Communist Russia or industrialized). Such were the general ideas I had as a student and later, at Vanderbilt University, I found others who were thinking about the same thing. This rambling preface to short answers to your questions should guarantee that such answers will be short. I shall take your questions in order:

1. The New Deal, of course, went far—and continues—in breaking down the Federal principle in our government, where a hard core of powers and jurisdictions belong to state and national government respectively and without challenge. A unitary form of government is rapidly replacing the Federal, which, of course, has the effect of placing the social and economic life of the Amer-

ican people under the national government. All this and the enormous government spending during both war and half-war has greatly increased the industrialization of both North and South. In the South this industrialization continues, primarily, as an enlargement of the old absentee landlordism, with, however, more and more Southern participation in the ownership of corporation stock—though not much increase in the South's participation in control. If the right kind of home-controlled industrialization can be brought about, there is no question in my mind that the South, in order to have a balanced economy, needs more industry. But with the control in the East and North, the first slump that hits will find the Southern industries being closed down before the others are touched. I saw this happen in Birmingham, owned largely by U. S. Steel etc., in the very beginning of the first symptoms of the depression. It happened everywhere else in the South in the heavy industries. The great war and semi-war spending has greatly stimulated the prosperity of the rural areas of the South, for farm products have been easily sold and at a good price. This has brought about a much wider-spread land-ownership and a much healthier rural community life in most areas. In other words, "War Economy" has, with the increased industrialization, greatly aided agrarianism in the South from the economic point of view.

Yet this, to a large extent, let me repeat, is based upon a "War Economy." What happens when there is world peace—of course it may be 100 years in coming—and all the nations of the world are self-sufficient industrially? When Japan, Germany, England, France, Russia, China, India, our Latin American neighbors, all, become competitors in the world market, willing to sell—just as we are—but unwilling to buy—just as we are? In other words, what happens when the world market becomes *non est*? We in the South will of course be plucked first, if control remains as it is; but in the long run, it seems inevitable that we as a nation shall have built our industrial plant too large in terms of the market, and the whole nation will be plucked.

The Marxists, of course, look forward to the day when such a situation will arise. This, they believe, will be the end of nationalism and private capitalism, industrial and otherwise. We will go

into bankruptcy, and the Marxists will be the receivers. But democratic socialism, I am firmly convinced, where personal liberty and civil rights must be respected by the government, will be less able to survive under the impact of over-industrialization than would a capitalistic and privately owned industrial system. Only the totalitarian, slave society and state can operate a Marxist economy. Such a slave state has no regard for human life and the rights and dignity of man as such. It starves and executes millions and drives the remainder with the whip, the bayonet and by black-mail. No Communistic state would or could develop—from within—in a country whose economy is widely owned and controlled and where there is a nice balance between industry and agriculture. I, therefore, after many years find myself still an agrarian, as I understood and understand agrarianism.

2. The rural South is paying off its debts, the ownership of land is far more widespread among those who live on the land than it was—though, as I said, “War Economy” is largely responsible, and young men and women who graduate from college now find it both profitable and respectable—these are too closely connected in all matters, I fear—to become farmers. But there is one feature in the South, especially the Lower South where cotton was king, that strikes me as permanent and of profound significance. An economic revolution is taking place before one’s eyes: the rapid conversion of the cotton fields to pasture lands, scientifically managed. In the Blackbelt of Alabama and Mississippi, and in Florida, the native *per capita* cattle population within ten years has multiplied incredibly. In the Blackbelt of Alabama, for example, it is probable that the native cattle population is greater than that of any comparable area in the United States. This is especially true of beef cattle. Twelve months grazing is easily attained in all the Lower South, and the great variety of grasses and clovers that have been introduced from many parts of the world are rapidly turning the old cotton kingdom into “green pastures” and “still waters.” The grazing of cattle is now becoming an important part of even the “row crop” farmers’ economy. The marketing of timber to the pulp mills is another feature being added to the Southern farmers’ economy.

3. I believe that agrarianism, as we contemplated it, had a

very powerful religious content. Without being fundamentalist in the literal interpretation of the Holy Writ, the contributors of *I'll Take My Stand*, with a few exceptions, felt that no society could long endure that eliminated God from its life and habits. Those who felt thus were likewise supporters of the Christian version of man's relation to man and to God. I am very strongly convinced that the college youth, in the South at least, is far more earnest in his religious life than were the generations of the First World War and the "Fabulous Twenties." I believe that the feeling is growing among our younger people that the struggle between America and her allies on the one hand, and Russia and her allies or slaves on the other, involves man's entire relationship to God; and that should Communism win, this relationship as we comprehend it will be terminated. God will be expelled from human society, and we will be as the beasts of the field.

4. The Nashville agrarians made a strategic error in giving themselves a tag and in making what appeared extreme statements to an unprepared world. *I'll Take My Stand* created in many circles about the same impression as that of a brickbat tossed through a glass window into a room where a group of elderly spinsters were playing Pollyanna. It has always been my strong belief that the publishers virtually suppressed the book after one frightened look at its contents. The book had a tremendous impact in certain circles. Although the writers were Protestants, numerous members of the Catholic clergy became keenly interested, and joined in the movement. Several Catholics, including one Jesuit Priest, J. C. Rawe, contributed to *Who Owns America*, and at least one Catholic paper with a very large number of subscribers, contributed many articles to a discussion of *I'll Take My Stand* and to a propagation of many of the implied or stated principles. I had a considerable correspondence with Senator John Bankhead, who read some if not all of our writings on the subject, and he was in agreement with the principles though not the exact methods set forth in my "Pillars of Agrarianism" and it probably had some bearing on his sponsoring the Bankhead-Jones Act, which contemplated the rehabilitation in terms of landownership of the tenant farmers. The tag "Agrarianism" and some of the shockingly frank and blunt opinions and conclusions that we put forth doubtless caused the

timid to scatter for shelter and to make use of ideas very cautiously—but nevertheless to make use of them. I believe, in other words, that the writings of the Agrarians on the subject of agrarianism had much more influence than might appear on the surface.

5. I do not see how regionalism as a literary, sociological, cultural, economic, or political movement could be inconsistent in any basic principle with agrarian principles. In its broader sense, literary regionalism—as Davidson would see it, especially Davidson with whom I agree—is an inherent part of Southern Agrarianism.

The agrarians were, to me, a most fascinating group when the bulk of them taught at Vanderbilt or lived in the vicinity. It will, of course, never be forgotten that these writers were scholars and literary figures of importance entirely aside from their agrarian writings. Because of this fact, they gradually scattered in pursuit of their several professions, and the break-up of the group contributed the major cause for the termination of agrarian writings. The coming of the Second World War with its War Economy and its emphasis on industrial production was another important factor. But, as I have implied or stated already, the great fundamental problems that gave rise to *I'll Take My Stand*, *Who Owns America?*, and dozens of articles on the subject of agrarianism are unsolved: they have been adjourned, as it were; but when our "War Economy" ends, these unsolved problems of our society will be the first order of business on the country's and even the world's agenda.

Allen Tate

I have not changed any of my views on Agrarianism since the appearance of *I'll Take My Stand*; I merely see them in a very different perspective. At the time our symposium came out, I differed with some of my collaborators in not thinking that our ideas could ever be effective in any immediate political program or reform; the event, I believe, has confirmed my first opinion. I never thought of Agrarianism as a *restoration* of anything in the Old South; I saw it as something to be created, as I think it will in the long run be created as the result of a profound change.

not only in the South, but elsewhere, in the moral and religious outlook of western man. The South is still a region where an important phase of that change may take place; but the change will not, as I see it, be uniquely Southern; it will be greater than the South. What I had in mind twenty years ago, not too distinctly, I think I see more clearly now; that is, the possibility of the humane life presupposes, with us, a prior order, the order of a unified Christendom. The Old South perpetuated many of the virtues of such an order; but to try to "revive" the Old South, and to build a wall around it, would be a kind of idolatry; it would prefer the accident to the substance. If there is a useful program that we might undertake in the South, would it not be towards the greater unity of the varieties of Southern Protestantism, with the ultimate aim the full unity of all Christians? We are told by our Northern friends that the greatest menace to the South is ignorance; but there is the even greater ignorance of the delusion of progressive enlightenment.

H. C. Nixon

The theme of *I'll Take My Stand* has as much significance for today as for the year of its first appearance. If writing my piece on that symposium again, I might revise it and refine it, but not reverse it. I see more danger today than I saw in 1929 of a Southern worship of industrial gods and economic progress, with no little disregard of our traditional values in an atmosphere of technological illiteracy. I might again disclaim my intention of opposing Southern industrialization, considered as a fact without exaggeration and without privilege. But I still see strong ground for apprehension over an articulate spirit of industrialism which is claiming so much for itself in the South today. I fear that we are exchanging our agrarian culture for an economic-industrial-urban civilization, with our institutions of learning becoming more and more vocational and informational but less educational. We are about to accept industrial processes as our masters instead of our slaves, thus casting our lot with a too acquisitive society

and permitting the profit motive right of way over a sense of leisure and a sense of honor. We are losing the art of living in an over-powering emphasis on developing the art of getting a living. We are developing experts and "go-getters" but running into a shortage of whole men to sustain the heritage of a Jefferson, a Madison, or a John Taylor of Caroline, not to mention other agrarian statesmen of the region. It is high time for the South to review its past and the ideas of its great men of the countryside.

Andrew Nelson Lytle

5. I don't know what sociological movement is unless it as a movement form one discrete object to another, lost always in the particular, never able to withdraw and generalize. And certainly I do not think any of those involved in agrarianism thought of themselves as sociologists. They were re-examining a certain inheritance, a certain polity, a set of principles and ideas whose history was as old as Christendom—an examination which seemed urgent enough before a society whose leaders, as well as most of the body politic, were bewitched by economic determinism. Monopoly Capitalism was the politico-economic implement of Calhoun's rule of the numerical majority. This wise man who foresaw so much foretold in his dying words the damage the modern American state would inflict upon its citizens. (*The poor South, the poor South, I don't know what will become of her might have been the poor American*). As he saw, the numerical majority is always controlled by an active, self-interested minority; I believe it was pointed out that this majority, dispossessed of property (ownership with control) but left with the vote, must institute a servile state.

The move in this direction has increased in speed since the Second World War, the shift from privately controlled monopolies to state-controlled. In the one instance you have the small group of irresponsible experts controlling large holdings of money and corporate wealth, to all practical extent owning it, since control is final by the measure of ownership. On the other hand you have



Photograph by MARJORIE BARRETT

The theme of DR. MARION JUNKIN's new mural is man's persistent struggle for intellectual freedom despite the heavy odds. The first detail, composed of masks, totems, and fears, is taken from the primitive section.



Photograph by MARJORIE BARRETT

The second detail is an excerpt from the medieval section. It shows the body of a man who is bound and mutilated, but whose hand still gropes for the telescope as the symbolic key to open up new worlds.

the state as the absolute owner of things, hence men. This condition offers at least theoretical responsibility. Theoretically you can vote the government out; but this possibility lessens with the increase of bureaucracy in government and with the multiplying power of pressure groups. The change already wrought is so far advanced that when the roving widow-woman keeps talking about human rights as opposed to property rights, nobody in government circles has reminded her of the old American truism that one of the human rights is the right to hold property. If such a remark had been overheard by Washington, Adams or Jefferson, none of those gentlemen would have felt called on to reply. They would have hinted very courteously that the woman's place is in the home.

An entire generation has been born into this condition; accepts it as the normal thing. I asked a bright, comely football player what he was going to do when he quit playing football. He was going to get a job, he said, which when he reached sixty would pay him a pension. I was so shocked I didn't tell him that when I was his age I couldn't have conceived of ever being so old. This is the true end of free enterprise when it is not constrained by the balanced disciplines which maintain the humane concept of man, the individual of rich possibilities, with a soul to be gained or lost, as he explores and uses the gifts of nature and society. A concept is not enough, nor is a set of principles enough. I think now the agrarians made a tactical error in allowing the word agrarian (in their arguments they were not confined by it) to stand for their protest. As a definition it was too exclusive. It gave leverage to the opposition. (The Communists, however, did not mistake the full intention of meaning.) But even as I say this, I know that I am in part misinterpreting the action of twenty years ago. Every idea and action is a growth and a self-discovery. After all it took great effort to withdraw from the prevailing quick-sands of the materialism everywhere about. The general feeling, if I recollect it aright, was that the idea of society we were attacking was established and would continue to prevail. We did not see any better than others the crack in the edifice which the great crash and depression exposed to the confusion of all.

There must be an image of destiny out of which matter, forever disintegrating, can forever be recreated. Calvin who brought

Doom back into the apprehension of man stripped the image of the Cross. Her Ladyship the Virgin whom the Spaniards brought in to the New World was lost to English-speaking peoples. Consequently we have no image now. Lacking this, that is visible form whose roots are metaphysical, we have no sure guide to show us the way in small actions and great. Reliance upon matter returns us to a chaos where powers meet powers, unrestricted except as one is more puissant than another. This leads inevitably to the final terrifying monopoly . . . unless by act of will men can recover some controlling image which will reduce nature and the nature in man to order, first spiritual, then temporal; or perhaps they return contemporaneously. It need not take many. One man might be enough. Gregory the Great had the vision to use St. Benedict's order to recover the fields and woods and streams which war had made over to the beasts and, by withdrawing from the chaos of the failing empire, save the West. We have not yet reached that extremity but we can. We are at the tail-end of the Renascence. It was the Renascence which created the image of the Fountain of Youth. Because man was still close enough to nature and the Old Church, his revolutionary idea took the form of a physical place, whose waters would overcome death by a perpetual renewal. The abstract thought which proposes to force from matter its secret comes right out of the earlier image of the Fountain. But it ought to be plain now that the more perfect man makes the instrument by which he will know and control the world the more readily does he compound the evil of his own nature.

The present dilemma for the man who would realize his total being is the necessity of creating the world and then living in it. This is beyond the energies of most. It will take old faith renewed or some new revelation. I seem to recollect that old Kentuckian who said "Tom Jefferson is forgot, Calhoun and Clay dead, and I aint feeling so well myself." When you didn't feel so well in those days you took calomel. Maybe we are closer to a great purging than we think, for nobody even in high places seems to feel too well about the way things are going. And that, let us hope, will be a renewal.

John D. Wade

1. It seems to me that the ideal of a great number of small holders and owners is more remote than it was when *I'll Take My Stand* was written.

2. The tendencies toward "Agrarianism" seem to me few and far between in the South of 1952. Possibly there are some seed in the earth, but they are not perceptibly sprouting in any free way. The fact that a number of intellectuals have come to an "Agrarian" way of thinking may mean something hopeful for the far future.

3. I think that all the essays in *I'll Take My Stand* were done in recognition of the necessity of religion, of man's regarding his dependency as well as his masterfulness,—of his realization that the great symbols of religion are timeless and general. The popular conviction to this effect seems to me no better than it was twenty years ago. Again, I may express an idea that a number of intellectuals having come to this point of view offers hope.

4. I think *I'll Take My Stand* impressed favorably many excellent people, but the over-all contention of the book is perhaps less valued than it was earlier.

5. Anything that challenges the current growth of centralization is surely, in a sense, a fit ally of "Agrarianism." Personally, then, I regard the regionalists with cordial interest.

I fear that all of the above sounds empty and windy past tolerance,—but the questions and all of the modifications needed in answering, all of the confusion of terms (Agrarianism, Regionalism, etc.) might well call forth a folio volume.

Ashley Brown

A Note on

GOD WITHOUT THUNDER

No review of the Agrarians would be complete without a reference to Mr. Ransom's *God Without Thunder*. Indeed, only after a careful reading of this influential and extraordinary book can one precisely estimate the intellectual range of the Agrarian movement. While it is quite true that Agrarianism on its economic side has an impressive tradition behind it (Jefferson, John Taylor of Caroline, Edmund Ruffin, and so on), its ultimate justification is not found in purely economic terms. *God Without Thunder* provides a certain metaphysical depth which is not always present in *I'll Take My Stand* and *Who Owns America?* and it certainly carries the Agrarian argument beyond the point where it is usually dismissed as an economic absurdity.

When it first appeared in 1930, almost concurrently with *I'll Take My Stand*, Mr. Ransom's book was not favorably received in most quarters. Outside the immediate Nashville circle a few critics, notably Francis Fergusson and Scott Buchanan, acknowledged its seminal value, while disagreeing with some of its particular conclusions. Since that time *God Without Thunder* has increasingly been cited as important, even while it has become a collector's item in the book market. Why has this been the case?

Mr. Ransom has boldly challenged the modernist movement at a point of great strategic interest: its deity. His thesis is that the old God of mysterious contingency and power has been gradually superseded by a singularly amiable and abstract God. Modern science, with its drive to subordinate nature, has been chiefly responsible for this transformation, but only too many theologians and men of affairs, abandoned to the drift of events, have willingly assented to it. In fact, the theoretical and practical triumphs of science are no longer seriously questioned. Why, then, does Mr.

Ransom bother with nice theological distinctions? He does not make the conventional and genteel attack on science in the names of the "humanities."

The new doctrine, Mr. Ransom maintains, has set up a God who has developed out of the Christ of the New Testament, the embodiment of physical welfare and social benevolence, a Logos, who has reduced the God of the Old Testament to a minor figure in the Trinity. The sense of evil and even natural imperfection has all but disappeared under this dispensation; we are lulled into security by our partial conquest of time and space, and only occasionally does "tragedy" present itself in the earthquake or the airplane crash. Every scientific formulation is offered as proof of the new God's beneficence, until by now most of the old supernatural dogmas have been discarded as superfluous. The Biblical stories themselves have been received into history, i.e., subjected to factual scrutiny, and they turn out to be "myths."

At this point Mr. Ransom frankly defends religious orthodoxy with his conception of myth: a myth is a metaphysical principle which is inherently important, vivid and energetic, institutionalized, and generally in keeping with our temper. A powerful myth dramatizes the universe by being both significantly inclusive and close to the concrete nature around us. Mr. Ransom would recover the myth of the old God, not to overthrow the sciences, but to know the world which the scientific reports never adequately represent. His argument is undoubtedly a sophisticated one, and it probably occurs in a fatally late moment of our historic progress. What has all this to do with Agrarianism?

Mr. Ransom remarks that our worship of the Logos has made our experience itself increasingly abstract. The human reason, always predatory, has now become positively efficient and threatens to cancel the richness from the commonest action. We sometimes seem on the point of disappearing into the categories we have set up, as consumers of socially approved brands, heroes of the Kinsey Report, readers of *Time*, and so on. Clearly almost any enterprise which would disperse this situation is desirable. Mr. Ransom criticizes industrialism in these terms:

Industrialism assumes that man is merely a creature of instincts. That is, he is essentially an animal with native ap-

petities that he must satisfy at the expense of his environment. His life consists entirely in the satisfaction of his appetite, but he differs from the other animals in one glorious particular: he has reason. And what is its function? His reason is a superior cunning that enables him to get the objects of appetite out of nature faster, in greater purity, and in more abundance than they can. His reason is his science, and its characteristic act is to supply him with a process or tool which will wrest from nature with ridiculous ease the objects of his desire. In other words, man is an animal, but with a reason which permits him to live a life more animal than that of animals. For his reason serves his instinct, and concentrates and brutalizes the usual process of desire and satisfaction.

The agrarian society outlined in *I'll Take My Stand* is intended as a kind of corrective for the drive towards pure rationalistic conquest and its concomitant religion of the Logos. It assumed that such a society is in accordance with the true order of God, nature and man, and is not based entirely on an appeal to Southern prejudice. As Mr. Robert Penn Warren said on a later occasion:

The agrarian establishment, presumably, would provide fuller opportunity for the play of man's sensibility or in other words, for the play of his proper humanity. The essential qualities of that establishment—order, tradition, stability—are merely aspects of that sensibility.

It is difficult in such a short notice to do justice to *God Without Thunder*. Much of the book's vitality is in its distinctive language, which never fails to render the tone appropriate to a given turn of discourse. The section on the Miltonic epics is brilliant criticism, and makes choice reading for literary people.

But the central argument on the nature of the new God—"without thunder"—is in some ways more cogent than it was twenty years ago. Nowadays we are getting some very exciting and hard thinking from theologians in various quarters—Barth and his Crisis Theology, Niebuhr, Maritain (but not Schweitzer). We are also having the issues confused by the sort of belief sponsored so aggressively by the Luce magazines and their kindred publications; surely Rockefeller Center is not that pious. At a time when many churches are hardly more than social centers, and

the average college student cannot distinguish Isaiah from Isis, clearly traditional religion has lost something. It will do no good to rail against science any further. Perhaps only a cultivation of myth on something like Mr. Ransom's admittedly unorthodox terms would cut across the confusion; he is certainly modest about such an outcome.

At any rate, I should think that it is time for *God Without Thunder* to be republished, if Mr. Ransom would permit it. He undoubtedly would wish to amend numerous details and omit some of the polemics. But the larger part of the book is still valuable, and should be welcomed by a new audience, perhaps critically more intelligent than the one a generation ago.

Merrill Moore

FIVE SONNETS

OUR PURPOSE HERE TODAY

Our purpose here today is to tell the truth,
Not to regulate the record we present.

Even if I were arboreal and a sloth
It would not matter where the seasons went
So long as my tree stood supporting me
Hanging upside down perpetually.

O freshest image, O redundancy
Of creatures in the forest-depth

O King

Of all creation waiting in the rain
For mortals to be salvaged from their pain

O hopeless lies compounded in the fear
Of desolation and the pioneer
Destruction of the vessel of the truth—

Even if I were an humble sloth.

THE SEARS ROEBUCK CATALOGUE IS VAST
EMPIRICAL (AND VERY REASONABLE)

Here are the basic things that men desire
(And reasonably priced) besides the fire
With women interested in human needs;
Everything from iodine to seeds:

Everything, including electric toasters,
Fill the pages by the dinner roasters,
Everything, including ice-tea coasters
On trays for glasses
while the hostess waits

To set her reputation on the plates
Of purest china, and her glasses' sheen
On heavy napkins cut from damascene.

With all her ruffles at an empty place,
Often covered with a fall of lace
From Brussels or some other famous town.

IT WAS YEAR'S END

The endless year flows surreptitiously
Among cold pastures where the day has not
Surrendered to the challenge of a blast
Of water driven after Launcelot
Altered his decisions of the past,

And Guinevere, attired mysteriously,
Shouted the terms of pharmacology
Into the distance,
 and uncertainty
Changed the composition of the cast
So that the more experienced ones came last.

Then martinets in legislative halls
Vied for Chairmanships of Political Balls,

And sons and mothers, long time overdue,
Shuddered lest their auguries come true.

AUNT EMMA LIKED
ATLANTIC CITY AND FLORIDA

Aunt Emma told me what it meant to her,
To go to Atlantic City every summer
And stay at the Traymore where she once had lived
Many years before Uncle Milt had died.

She said she liked to attend the auction sales
On the board-walk. She would buy carloads of junk
And give things to her relatives,—her trunk
Was always full in Autumn when she returned.

"After spending the summer at Atlantic City"
The newspaper said, reporting her return,
"Mrs. Milton Blank will again be at her home
Until November."

Then to Florida.

Those were the main things she had to say;
That was her migration and her way.

I AM A BELIEVER IN TELEPATHY

The oldest communication is the best.
Before the voice, there was the eyelids' blink,
Then, later, the heliograph.

Inventors think

Telegrams—their messages addressed
So neat in yellow envelopes—the goal.

But, no, the wheel of years inclines to roll
Still further:

finally wireless succeeds

A new utility for human needs,
And we attend.

But mocking all of these

(Like gently moving wind among the trees)
There is a method of communication
Older than any present living nation:

Direct transference between minds and hearts.

All the rest are recent and upstarts.

Dan Taylor

SPRINGFIELD

The muffled engine sounds and the vibration of moving fell away as in a dream. Webb's huge hand was pumping my shoulder and I opened my eyes to see the driveway of his house, shaded and smelling fresh in the early morning coolness. I felt hungry for the first time in days.

The house was new and well kept and not too different from my own home. I'd never been as relieved to be anywhere as I was that day. Webb went familiarly up the steps and into the darkened kitchen. The blinds were down there as they were all over the house to keep it cool during the day. I wandered around the front rooms while Webb went up to wake his family. Inside, the house again reminded me of home: new and tastefully modern, with books and a long fireplace in the large front room.

He finally got them out of bed, because I heard pleased screams that must have been his little sister, and a bit later some moving around.

I sat in the dim room listening until he came down with his mother. She was very young, or probably just looked that way in her sun shorts. Her hair was piled on top of her head, and Webb had his arm about her waist. We went out to the kitchen and she moved about getting breakfast. I sat on a high leather stool hearing first her soft voice and then that of Webb in the hall calling his girl on the phone. When he came back he was with his father and we all ate together. After breakfast Webb's father left for work, and Webb sat talking to his mother. I slipped upstairs to get a shower and a shave. The bathroom was green tile, and there was a pile of big towels. I took a long while in the shower and made sure I got rid of the dust of the last few days that I was sure must almost be caked on my skin. It was very pleasant drying myself, standing where the sun poured through the blinds and steam. When I came down they were still talking, so I went out on the back lawn and stretched out in a deck chair.

Out there the last two days appeared worse than they had at the time. I God-damned Tom, and the heat and the corn, and it all comes back as clearly now as it did then. We had been going to college in the Southwest and Webb had promised to bring Tom home, and to drive me as far as his home in Ohio. I could get from there to Rhode Island easily enough, but Webb had wanted to take Tom right to his house. It was in Springfield, Illinois, and that looked pretty much out of the way on the map, at least to me. If it weren't for him we could have avoided going through Nebraska and Iowa altogether. The flat corn lands and the July heat had a particular horror for me that trip. The rows of great oily leaves crowded right down to the side of the highway and the tasseled tops waved in a mocking kind of frenzy. But most of all I minded the prairie sun. The temperature for most of the day must have stood over a hundred. It bothered me so much I tried to get through it by sleeping slumped down in the seat, but the sun would always work around full on me, and I'd wake up in a thick sweat. The endless parade of flapping glossy green scaled off the very air. Way up ahead the road seemed to end in one of those shifting sheets of water that lay over the road. I looked back and it gave me quite a turn to see one on the road behind us, too.

Looking at that fake water reminded me of Narragansett Bay and then home in general. Tom had been staring out at corn going by for quite a while, and I wondered if he had ever been east and seen anything else. Sometimes these farm boys have never even seen the ocean. The heat didn't seem to bother Tom the way it did me. At least he never said anything about it. I don't like people who never say what's really on their minds.

All the time Webb just sat up there driving with his huge hands draped over the wheel. He didn't look around much, and didn't seem to be tired. I tried to think back to sometime when I had known Webb to be tired. He seemed somehow above the commoner failings. I had known him a lot better than Tom at school. Webb, with photographs about his room, had been an incessant talker about the girl he was to marry, and whatever plans they were making at the time. He'd promised me to stop by if they came east on the wedding trip, and I'd promised to

take them sailing for the day. But Webb was quiet that trip for the most part and I was content to sleep as much as possible.

We went on for hours saying very little, and I thought by then they were feeling some of the apathy that bothered me until Tom unexpectedly began to talk. His voice went on in such a flat way I couldn't tell whether he was talking to only one of us or both. Once he started, and got involved, his voice went even lower and for me became another part of the consciousness, as had the sound of the car, half heard, half remembered.

At first I regarded the stories about his boyhood as casually as they deserved, and I'm sure I dozed, waking only if his voice became louder or if I slipped over to the door and the sun came on me again. When he began about his father, I listened, and he went on about a man at sea on different freighters with a wife in Providence, of all places, with her baby who later only remembered years of moving about until they stopped on a farm in Illinois. I wondered if their staying on in that place was a case the land finally claiming its own, or whether the sailor had dropped there out of sheer exhaustion. I laughed out loud at this, feeling a bit like that myself then, and they gave me a quick stare. So Webb was listening more intently than I thought, perhaps even as in an ordinary conversation, nodding at the proper pauses. I watched him for a time to see if it were so.

I had to shake myself awake then. It was getting late in the afternoon and much cooler than it had been before. Springfield, I noted with relief, couldn't be more than an hour or so away. Tom talked on and as we slipped through little towns he seemed to know he pointed out a high school his team had played in baseball or something just as purposeless to me. Those southern Illinois towns looked so much alike I wondered that he could tell them apart, but then it was only because of school athletic trips that he knew them at all. Each one seemed uniformly undistinguished, and I supposed that Springfield was much the same. The name was somewhat familiar, however, and it was only by thinking back that I remembered why. It was the place Lincoln grew up in, and where he is buried now.

I like a town with history, which is perhaps the best way to think of a place when you know it's pretty dull. I asked Tom about

it but he said Lincoln grew up in Salem, instead of Springfield, and that the highway went by the place, which had been rebuilt and put back the way it was when Abe kept a store. I looked forward to seeing that. After awhile we began talking about some of Lincoln's classic deeds of honesty, which are pretty unusual when you think about them, like his running miles in the rain to give a lady her change.

When we came to Salem the sun was low in the sky. A sign pointed to the village set back from the road and I made out white-capped tourists strolling between their cars and the log houses. There wasn't much to see and Webb didn't stop.

Later we crossed a new bridge over the river bed. The water wandered in little pools among the rocks, shrunken and dark. There couldn't have been much rain lately for the water to be that low.

Springfield was the usual traffic lights, signs and aging red brick buildings crowding the sidewalks. The streets were empty except for parked cars. Tom indicated turns and we came out abruptly on a large park which once must have been the central square. Long rows of tall elms, now grey in the dying light, merged at the tops covering the crossed gravel paths beneath. The paths were in blackness and gave off a cool grassy fragrance. Webb parked by the low iron fence and we got out stretching and staring into the darkness of the trees. I wasn't hungry, but crossed over with them when Tom pointed out a little restaurant facing the park.

An old ceiling fan stirred over the long, narrow room lit by naked light bulbs. A bar ran along one side and we sat there rather than at one of the red-checked cloth covered tables. Except for the old bartender, we were the only ones there. On the wall was a print of Custer's last stand, faded to a mustard yellow except for the peach colored axes of the Indians and the mouths of fallen horses. The place smelled pleasantly of beer.

Tom and Webb ordered veal chops, and I was sure I couldn't eat. I ordered beer instead, and watched the bubbles rise to the top before I raised the glass to Custer and began to drink. After another, my legs and arms began to relax, and I rubbed my eyes and my fingers were wet and cool from the glass.

The others were eating noisily, and hardly noticed me leave the

bar and go out through the screen door. From the steps the trees were faintly outlined against the sky and the red glow of a neon sign on the opposite street. I started through the park listening to birds settling in the black branches overhead. Coming out on the other street, I saw that the sign was over the entry to a cocktail lounge, a new brick building with wide plate windows overlooking a patio. I went up and looked for a moment through the entry at couples dancing in the pine paneled room; I couldn't hear the music through the glass. To the side a hat-check girl was staring at my open shirt and beard. I turned, giving her a nod, went down the patio and stepped over the low hedge.

Back at the car, Tom asked where I'd gone. While Webb fumbled with the keys I tried to get Tom to tell me a little about the cocktail lounge, but his manner in saying he didn't know implied that he hardly cared. I was curious at the time why he shouldn't have known something about the place, since it seemed to me to be a fairly promising spot. But then Tom asked if we would like to see Lincoln's tomb. Webb was reluctant to take the time, but the idea intrigued me, and I persuaded him to follow Tom's directions.

He took us through a maze of deserted side streets, and told us about how the tomb had once been broken into by vandals. Local legend had it that they were trying to steal the body. Afterwards, he said, the grave had to be opened in order to seal the casket in concrete and to check on the body. It was reported that Lincoln looked about like his pictures, except that the face was sunken and very dark. When we came up before the massive iron gates, they were locked with a chain. In the glare of the headlights I could read a small sign: "Equestrians Prohibited." Tom said the tomb had always been open before, he didn't understand. Then he suggested that Webb put on the spotlight, that you could see the top of the tomb over the trees. Webb flashed the light in both directions, the cold shaft moving along the line of foliage, but that was all we saw.

There was nothing else to be done but take Tom out to where he lived. If we spent the night there, and I supposed he might ask us, we could make Webb's place the next day nicely. Tom lived out on a highway south of the town. The night was turning cold

then, and I fished around in the litter of the back seat for a jacket, with no luck. We turned off the highway and the car lurched across a wooden bridge, rattling the planks, and labored up a rutted dirt road. On both sides was the corn, standing brown in the lights, stunted from lack of rain. Tom looked quickly to both sides. This must have been his father's field. A bit farther on we came to the yard, and the lights framed a stripped truck rotting in the grass behind a shed. Up on the left was the house. The porch lights were on.

Tom opened the car door, and called to a man standing on the porch. I hadn't seen him come out of the house; he wore overalls, without a shirt, his hair was grizzled and thin. He came quickly down to the car with a curious loping gait, half running, as if his feet bothered him. Tom put his arm around the man's shoulders and introduced us to him. Then a woman came down from the house, laughing and talking as she bobbed her head to each of us in turn. They both seemed large, and with the light behind them, of no certain age. While Webb got Tom's bags out of the trunk, I heard Tom ask her why she hadn't written.

"You know I don't write letters, honey," she said, "I haven't written four letters in my life. Sue's been in California four years now and I only wrote her but once." Then I noticed Tom standing to one side, smiling down at a little girl in a night-dress clutching at her mother's skirts. I hadn't seen her come out at all, but I remember the woman saying something like "You get back in the house. Go on, git, the idea."

The thought of spending the night there seized me with a cold sweat. I looked to see if Webb had felt it too, but I couldn't tell for sure. He was telling them good-by, though, and that we had to leave, that he wanted to get home as soon as he could. I shuddered with relief. I couldn't have spent the night in that place.

Anthony Harrigan

THE HURRICANE

The family fig tree flounders, for August
The month of storms, is flooding half the city
And hurricane waters rage. My elders send
Upstairs the antique furniture, and only tables
From the kitchen remain below. A sailor's ditty
Seeps into my brain. I ask: Will the wind rend
This ancestral house in twain? Will it bend
Our crazy shutters till they hang on the gables
As on a plague house undone by lust?

On the third floor in the empty rooms I see
The old parson's portrait and the landlord's
Glistening rifles. The heirs of an old planter
Stare at me from a faded daguerreotype. The time is ripe,
And the seedcase of the world is bursting. The sword's
Rusty in its scabbard as I draw it amidst the stir
In the great hall below. The prickly burr
On plants from Chile are among the tripe
Which falls like rot off a family tree.

The storm blows and ranges about our ears.
Then all is silence. Fools set out
To wade across tangled wires and streets
That are tidal streams gone wild. The bad time is to come.
The hurricane's peaceful eye flies by. In our redoubt
The crystal chandeliers crash down. The wind beats
Against our ancient front. Mother intreats
God: the fig tree stands and overcomes my fears.

Hugh Kenner

CONRAD AND FORD: THE ARTISTIC CONSCIENCE

The oldest of these books has been accessible for nearly fifty years, the youngest for nearly thirty.* All three are books the reader of novels cannot afford not to know. All three are faintly old-fashioned now; their solidity is Edwardian; the novel has moved on. Joyce solved problems Conrad never faced; Wyndham Lewis in *The Revenge for Love*—the finest “unknown” book in fifty years—brought politics into fiction in a way that has been neither surpassed nor examined; Ford himself, in *A Call* and elsewhere, developed Jamesian latencies that escaped the later interests of James and so made possible the finest parts of *Parade’s End*. Joyce, however, goes unexamined except by card-indexers; *The Revenge for Love* was ignored in England and suppressed in New York; and the recent Ford boomlet has confined its interests to what seems “safe.” The critical avant garde is busy discovering *Under Western Eyes* (1911) “appallingly corroborated by events that have become ominous reality in modern history” (introduction by M. D. Zabel), *Nostromo* (1904) an image of “man . . . precariously balanced in his humanity between the black inward abyss of himself and the black outward abyss of nature” (introduction by Robert Penn Warren), and *The Good Soldier* (1915) the sort of novel of which one can ask “But are not these ‘realities,’ in effect, ‘appearances’?” While in the course of reading it “we slowly learn to read ourselves” (introduction by Mark Schorer). It should be possible to seem them better than that in 1952, though it is something that they are seen at all.

The three books are thoroughly “written.” Conrad and Ford—it is becoming commonplace to observe—accepted from Flaubert

*Joseph Conrad: *Under Western Eyes* (New Directions)

Joseph Conrad: *Nostromo* (Modern Library)

Ford Madox Ford: *The Good Soldier* (Knopf)

the view that the novelist's job is to find words, sentence by sentence, for the unique instance, the particular case, the light of torches making the letters of an inscription leap out black from end to end of a long wall, the splash of fountains from the mouth of stone dolphins, a terrified student looking down a staircase: "Gazing down into the black shaft with a tiny glimmering flame at the bottom, he traced by ear the rapid spiral descent of somebody running down the stairs on tiptoe. It was a light, swift, pattering sound, which sank away from him into the depths: a fleeting shadow passed over the glimmer—a wink of the tiny flame. Then stillness." This—from *Under Western Eyes*—not only neatly illustrates Conrad's formula, "... above all, to make you see," it illustrates the mode of his most memorable effects. One is made to see not a man going down stairs, but a certain man, Haldin, with his characteristic manner of running, descending the stair of Razumov's lodging-house with the lamp at the bottom running out of Razumov's life (the sound "sank away from him into the depths") to a police trap and doom ("a wink of the tiny flame. Then stillness.") The whole first part of *Under Western Eyes* is a tour-de-force of pregnant writing, the presented fact become the economic metaphor. Haldin, a political assassin, had come to Razumov for asylum, because he supposed Razumov was a kindred spirit. Razumov declined to compromise his own future and arranged the trap. The next sentence reads: "Razumov hung over, breathing the cold raw air tainted by the evil smells of the unclean staircase. All quiet." The air of freedom, the smell of his own treachery. Then composure: "He went back into his room slowly, shutting the door after him. The peaceful steady light of his reading-lamp shone on the watch. Razumov stood looking down at the little white dial. It wanted yet three minutes to midnight. He took the watch into his hand fumblingly." The imbalance of his composure is reserved for the last word in the fourth of these sentences; "fumblingly" strikes the reader with much the same surprise as the fact that his hand was unsteady must have struck Razumov. Such minutely dramatic writing, never overtly "symbolic" but always in touch with larger meanings through the presented facts which hold the reader's attention from sentence to sentence, carries Flaubert's techniques into areas where Flau-

bert, the Stoic comedian, never ventured. *Under Western Eyes* affords 99 such pages, unbroken.

Then Conrad's devotion to "the way of doing a thing that shall make it undergo most doing" takes over. The Western Eyes of the elderly language teacher are interposed between the reader and the Razumov saga, and the narrative never really regains momentum. This frustration for the unsophisticated reader, in quest of a story, corresponds, it is important to note, to a disappointment for the critical reader. It is not that the change of the perspective breaks the action; there are artistic reasons for breaking it. It is rather that the presented fact is withdrawn to a considerable remove from our attention; commentary, the arranging and presenting consciousness of the detached man who is supposed to be editing Razumov's diary and narrating what came under his own observation, becomes a medium through which, so to speak, the subsequent events—often crashingly melodramatic events—are reviewed. The phony revolutionaries who begin to swarm—Peter Ivanovich, Madame de S.—don't weigh as they should against the genuine moral dilemma of the Razumov whom they take for an ally, because they don't exist. They coincide too closely with the scepticism of the elderly narrator to have a life of their own; that they are bundles of quite predictable mannerisms isn't an ironic element in their character but a defect in their presentation, for we come to see them as a mere manifestation, a cruder manifestation than is the narrator, of the temperamental scepticism which Conrad is determined to inject into the book. Conrad's ironies of character are almost always facile; *The Secret Agent*, for instance, is a less interesting book than current accounts suggest. "Technique," in the "detached" parts of his books, becomes a cover-up for the fact that his mind has ceased to be obsessed by the reality of his subject, that he has withdrawn from his material and begun to manipulate it, as he considers, philosophically.

Nostromo, as much his most anxiously-meditated fiction, is the fullest case of this curious phenomenon. Much of the time—when he is "creating" the town and characters—one can see very little. It is exactly when the narrative breaks loose—in the marvelous night voyage of Decoud and Nostromo with the treasure—that the prose unclogs and one reads on unfatigued. *Nostromo* is

a brilliantly excogitated book, wrought detail by detail with barely a chink; but Dr. Leavis' grudging verdict that its reverberation "has something hollow about it" corresponds to a pervading forced "significance" that localizes itself in analytic images like "The sense of betrayal and ruin floated upon his sombre indifference as upon a sluggish sea of pitch" and statements like "In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part" which are neither sufficiently grounded in the presented facts of the book nor sufficiently backed by a communicated sense of the author's experience. This last sentence is part of the analysis of Decoud's breakdown, but it doesn't stay within its *données*; it comes as a portentous aside from Conrad. The minutely wrought solidity of *Nostromo* derives, as much as anything, from its being willed into existence, the characters created to illustrate a theme, the theme worked out in an elaborately balanced plot with appropriate symbols in incident and setting, every detail arranged, and the whole painstakingly focussed so that Conrad's essential want of belief in the reality of what he is presenting is disguised as a "detachment" intrinsic to the book's philosophy. It is perhaps the very intimacy of the creative impulse, in this instance, with the philosophical that has won *Nostromo* its reputation as Conrad's supreme achievement; it is certainly an achievement of sheer scrupulousness that the result appears so solid, but there is very little in *Nostromo* as immediate as whole sections of *Under Western Eyes*. Conrad, at bottom, doesn't know what his attitude to his events and characters is, and that is what "detachment" conceals; nor will Mr. Warren's Kafkaesque speculations about "the true lie," "fidelity," "moral infection and redemption" bring the book really to any but a willed life.

Ford had no "philosophy"; that is perhaps the reason for his long neglect. Far more impressively than Conrad has he the ability to invent exactly the right words from moment to moment; the prose texture of *The Good Soldier* is unfailingly vivid: "I had forgotten about his eyes. They were as blue as the sides of a certain type of box matches. When you looked at them carefully you saw that they were perfectly honest, perfectly straightforward, perfectly, perfectly stupid. But the brick pink of his complexion, running

perfectly level to the brick pink of his inner eyelids, gave them a curious, sinister expression—like a mosaic of blue porcelain set in pink china. And that chap, coming into a room, snapped up the gaze of every woman in it, as dexterously as a conjuror pockets billiard balls." *The Good Soldier* is in more than one way a *tour de force*. Ford arranges words so as to produce constant surprise, constant small shocks to the attention. He arranges incidents in the same way. Theme words drop into place, key scenes recur in new contexts, an intricate tangle of cross-reference conveys the illusion of living complexity assuming no more and no less order than life assumes. With a technique of far greater virtuosity than Conrad's goes a far greater sense of flexible life. Ford's heroes, like Conrad's, undergo mute ordeals, but without suggesting to the reader a "symbolic" remoteness. If Conrad wrote out of his capacity for scepticism, Ford wrote out of his capacity for compassion and worry. Worry is the stuff of his situations; on Edward Ashburnham is heaped a worry so intolerably complex that he breaks. As in *Parade's End*, the impasse is adulterous; it is essential to the structure of *The Good Soldier* that it shall be an impasse. The narrator suffers on his own account as much as on Edward's; he is himself in fact a party to the impasse. Within this simple matrix Ford deploys with consummate virtuosity his trivial, melodramatic incidents. A book was never, from one point of view, better written.

There is no pretense of detachment; the whole is ordered by a shocked narrator. And the narrator's bewilderment is Ford's most serviceable device; for it prevents him from having to resolve the book. The convention of the book is that the narrator resolves it by writing it: the last turn of Ford the technician's screw. If one seeks for a centre, one is driven through ironic mirror-lined corridors of viewpoint reflecting viewpoint, and this is of the book's essence; an optical illusion of infinite recession. Ford, one uneasily supposes, doesn't himself know what his attitude is to the situation he presents. The gap between presentation and "values" is never bridged. Ford's presented values are those of the craftsman; the man Ford, most compassionate of novelists, is himself in an impasse, an impasse of sympathy for all sides.

It is impertinent to turn to biography: Ford's Catholicism, his

adulteries, and the unresolved conflicts of his life. At ease, he threw off in his memoirs (for this reviewer, his best fiction) masks of himself so engaging as to make these factors of negligible weight. But that he presents himself more convincingly than he does any other character throws light on what the virtuosity of *The Good Soldier* is masking; a suspension of judgment that looks like technique and is in fact bewilderment. If Conrad forced into "philosophy" a naive 19th century scepticism: man alone in a meaningless universe, making fictions to live by, Ford forced into "technique" a more permanent plight: that of a man incapable of squaring his values with his actions, incapable of repudiating anything that has once laid claim on his sympathy.

Though his achieved fictions haven't Conrad's weight, Ford should have come nearer to being a great novelist; he had more to work with; Conrad's central theme may well in another fifty years seem as dated as *In Memoriam*. Both of them might have been weightier if technique hadn't seduced them, hadn't persuaded them that they had solved at the level of judgment problems which they were accustomed to coping with at the level of literary presentation. But technique seduced them because it was important; no one but Henry James, in those years, understood its claims so clearly; almost alone they had to redeem the English novel for the intelligent world. They did that, and they wrote memorable pages. They might have done more in another language, or at another time; but perhaps they did more than we might reasonably expect. It was no small achievement to maintain an artistic conscience in Balfour's England, to wrestle in those times of facile writing with the exact enduring word, Razumov leaning over the banister listening to the light swift pattering sound which sank away from him into the depths, or Edward Ashburnham, sentimentalist to the last, speaking with the penknife in his hands the precise last words that will epitomize a sentimentalist's life: "So long, old man, I must have a bit of rest, you know."